

NORTHEAST AND MIDWEST CONSERVATION EDUCATION COUNCIL CHARTER

PURPOSE: The formation of a Northeast and Midwest Conservation Education Council is proposed to improve the efficiency and enhance the capacity to deliver high quality conservation education efforts throughout the Northeast and Midwest. The impetus for the Council's development came from the FY00 and 01 conservation education budget advice asking for the formation of regional councils to improve program coordination.

PARTNERS: Partners participating in the Council include the Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, North Central Research Station, Northeastern Research Station, Forest Products Laboratory, and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters.

VISION: Through focused messages targeted audiences are connected to the environment and enabled to take informed actions related to natural resource management and the sustainability of forests. The Forest Service and the State Forestry partners are key points of contact for conservation education expertise, information and materials.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: Conservation education efforts in the Northeast and Midwest are guided by the following principles:

- There is a wealth of existing natural resource educational materials available. Emphasis is placed on effectively marketing these materials to target audiences.
- Conservation education materials are evaluated against the national standards for excellence developed by the North American Association for Environmental Education and Forest Service standards and learner guidelines, as they are developed.
- Input from our customers is valued and incorporated into program design and delivery.
- The conservation education program is responsive to current natural resource issues facing the Forest Service.
- There are many players in the conservation education field. The unique niche of the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners in conservation education is in our access to natural resource information, our staff with the technical expertise to develop and deliver materials, and our having places for learning to happen.
- Collaboration between Forest Service units in conservation education program design and delivery occurs routinely.
- Conservation education in the Northeast and Midwest is a cooperative effort where each partner's strengths are recognized and effectively utilized.

THEMES: Conservation education efforts in the Northeast and Midwest will incorporate the following themes:

1. The value of trees, forests, forest ecosystems and forest products in enhancing quality of life.
2. Caring for trees, forests, and forest ecosystems to ensure forest health and sustainability.
3. Maintaining and restoring the biodiversity of native forest ecosystems.
4. The positive role trees, forests, and forest ecosystems play in protecting water.

Conservation education programs and materials will build awareness and understanding of interrelationships in natural systems and between people and the land. It will teach the skills needed to sustain forest resources by emphasizing how the decisions each of us make every day

impact the forest environment. At the same time our audiences will learn more about the role Forest Service and State Forester land managers play in sustaining our region's forest resource, and become aware of natural resource career options.

TARGET AUDIENCES: The national *Vision to Action Strategy: Conservation Education Task Force Report and Recommendations* identified the primary target audience of Forest Service conservation education efforts as youth, urban communities, and forest visitors. The primary focus for urban audiences in the Midwest and Northeast will be urban youth. Implementation of conservation education programs will recognize that the most efficient way to reach the youth audience is through formal (K-12) and non-formal (e.g. scouting, after-school programs, recreation centers, etc.) educators.

KEY ISSUES: Four key issues have been identified as barriers to reaching the conservation education vision. These issues will be the initial focus of the conservation education strategy. These issues are:

1. Conservation education is not coordinated across deputy areas or disciplines. This has resulted in a lack of message and audience focus and duplication of efforts. Additionally, the role of each of the partners has not been clearly identified.
2. Formal and non-formal educators are unaware of the wealth of natural resource education information and materials available from the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners.
3. Forest Service and State Forestry staff interested in conservation education are not aware of the educational materials available, nor are they adequately trained in effective educational delivery methods.
4. The benefits of conservation education have not been clearly demonstrated to Forest Service or State Forestry leadership, resulting in conservation education receiving a very low priority in allocation of financial and staff resources.

PROCESS: A regional conservation education strategic plan will be developed to address these key issues in order to achieve the following outcomes.

OUTCOMES: Two sets of outcomes are presented. The first set of outcomes, or short-term outcomes, will be achieved when the issues listed above are addressed through implementation of the regional conservation education strategic plan. The second set of outcomes, or long-term outcomes, will be achieved when the Forest Service and their partners are working together seamlessly to design and effectively deliver conservation education programs.

Short-term outcomes

1. The Forest Service and the Northeastern State Foresters work together to develop and deliver conservation education programs. These programs and supporting materials focus on the four core themes and reach target audiences.
2. Formal and non-formal educators see the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners as an important source of conservation education expertise, information and materials.
3. Interested Forest Service and State Forestry staff are aware of conservation education materials and are able to effectively participate in the delivery of educational programs and materials.
4. Conservation education is an integral part of the Forest Service and State Forestry mission. Adequate financial and technical resources are allocated and the benefits of the program are clearly demonstrated.

Long-term outcomes

1. Forest visitors, targeted youth and urban communities (our target audience) understand the value of trees, forests and forest ecosystems in enhancing quality of life.
2. Targeted audiences have an awareness of forest health and sustainability, understand how the decisions each one of us make each day impact the forest environment, and have the basic skills to make choices that contribute to sustaining forest resources.
3. Target audiences understand the roles the Forest Service and state forestry agencies play in sustaining forest resources.
4. Target audiences are aware of possible career options in natural resource management.

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